



Learning Gains through Play

SchoolNet South Africa has had the privilege to be funded over the next three years by the D G Murray Trust in South Africa to study the benefits of learning through the use of play and innovative technologies for learners in grades R and 1 in ten schools in two provinces in South Africa, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

The D G Murray Trust has a particular interest in the early primary years where the greatest impact can be made. As the focus of this project is play, we have selected Xbox Kinect games and Android Apps. The first workshops have just taken place for the KwaZulu-Natal schools.

Change Leadership for Senior Management Teams

The first workshop for the project was for the HODs and principals from the 5 KZN schools and was held at Thembelihle Primary School in Howick, as from 14th July 2014. Hlengiwe Mfeka and Senzo Ngcobo were the SchoolNet Facilitators and Rodney Nissen from the Western Cape Education Department joined this workshop with the intention of replicating the training in his province.



Mr Zondi - Linda Zuma – give one get one



Hlengiwe and Senzo facilitating

As schools were clustered at a central venue, it took a short while for participants to feel at ease with their new colleagues. However it was not long before the discussions around teaching strategies encouraged sharing and immersion in the changes they were about to initiate in their schools. Quite different leadership styles became evident among the schools. The second day started with brainstorming their homework as well as items from the previous day's workshop. Results are captured below in a wordle:



Although the role play activity was carried out with great gusto, deep reflection had to be devoted to planning the story board and to exploring solutions the problem scenarios posed. Each actor was superbly convincing and with just the right degree of humour included. The problems posed were related to the authentic context of managing new technologies in their schools. Very clear thinking through and problem solving skills became apparent from the groups through role play. The highlight of the day was the filming of performances in front of the whole group.



Hlengiwe evaluated the role play performances according to a prescribed list of criteria; the three winners, Nombuso Sosibo (Nogqaza Primary), Thembi Mbanjwa (Qhamukile Primary) and Linda Zuma (Cedara Primary) were delighted with their prizes. The workshop closed on a very positive note in high spirits.



The end of the workshop for senior management teams – showing off the workshop folders

Teacher Professional Development Workshop

Twenty two Grade 1 and Grade R teachers from the five KZN schools attended the next workshop. It seemed a great surprise to many that they were to receive a tablet – let alone the latest on the market – Samsung Galaxy Tab 3!



Thandazo Nldovu - Triandra Farm school



Hlengiwe Mfeka (SchoolNet) facilitating

Teachers in this project are going to earn the right to own the tablets during the course of the project. These tablets were deliberately not loaded with any content, apps or programmes. This was so that Hlengiwe could guide teachers through the process of installing apps themselves from an SD card that was loaded with hundreds of apps she had specifically prepared for them. Learner tablets are pre-loaded before delivery.

Some of the older, or 'more experienced' teachers were visibly shaking when opening their boxes of tablets for the first time, while the younger teachers were racing away with enthusiasm and

demonstrating their expertise. The balance between them may well be achieved when we apply these learning strategies in the classroom.

As this report is being written, Day Two is well underway – and there is a buzz of activity and a low hum of engaged concentration – some teachers have just successfully blue toothed their presentations to their facilitators.



During discussions teachers readily contributed ideas and many clearly demonstrated that they appreciated the subtleties of some of the teaching strategies being explored. A few teachers were unfamiliar with these methodologies and some of the terminology but many others soon became expert at identifying opportunities for the development of 21st Century skills such as Collaboration, Communication, Creativity and Critical Thinking. Some teachers remarked about the benefits of peer reviewing and were able to foresee how they would transfer this strategy to their classrooms.

In closing, the teachers were privileged to be addressed by Dr Hintsa Mhlane from the KZN Department of Basic Education and left the workshop with a good deal of information overload but confident about being supported – and already discussing the next workshop in September.



These teachers and their principals have committed themselves to devote a considerable amount of their time to the implementation of this three year programme in their schools.

The evaluation study

As the project title suggests, the aim is to explore learning gains through using play. SchoolNet has further lofty aims for this project, namely: to improve learning and literacies; to promote play and a spirit of enquiry in learners; to inspire teachers with new zest for learning and one very specific aim is to explore how cognitive development relates to motor development.

The evaluation of the learning gains project is following a developmental approach where the evaluator, Tracey Butchart is working closely with the project team as well as teachers and SMTs to interpret and adapt implementation as the project progresses.

Data from administering the first round of evaluation instruments for learners as well as teachers and management teams have already been collected in hard copy. Only one or two participants had their own email addresses at the start of the project but this stat has been radically changed this week - all future data will be gathered digitally.



Isibongo Primary – Control School



Temperance Town Primary

SchoolNet South Africa would like to thank the following organizations for their generous contributions to this initiative:

Microsoft South Africa for donating Xbox Kinect consoles and a range of games for all ten schools in the project;

The CSIR ICT4RED team for their willingness to allow the use of the professional development course materials

and of course, The DT Murray Trust for having the courage to fund this ground-breaking initiative.